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ABSTRACT

This factsheet explores the school counselor's role in helping college-bound students. Equity in counseling is considered in the areas of access to counseling and student tracking. Timelines in precollege counseling are presented for elementary and junior high grades, and for each grade level in high school. Eight resource documents are listed. (NB)

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HIGHLIGHTS...An ERIC/CAPS Digest

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Precollege Guidance and Counseling

Overview

Counseling is entrusted with the major responsibility of assisting students to make appropriate choices and decisions for the future, and thus is involved with the critical processes of student development and transition. Spurred on by the recent impetus toward reform and the concern with promoting excellence in education, the field of counseling recently has immersed itself in self-examination. In September 1984, the Trustees of the College Board appointed a 21-member Commission to review the evolution and current condition of precollege guidance and counseling, and to render judgments and recommendations. Their report, entitled *Keeping the Options Open*, was published in 1986. The National College Counseling Project (NCCP), formed in September 1983 and sponsored by the National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC), sought to examine the status of college counseling in schools across the country, analyzing the role of precollege counseling in enhancing student aspirations and in helping students gain admission to college. Their analysis, reported in *Frontiers of Possibility*, was also published in 1986.

The Counselor and Transition to College

The Decision to Enter College. Studies show that the greatest determinant of who goes to college is socioeconomic status. Parents and counselors are the primary influences. The decision is very different for first- and second-generation college entrants. Students who are most likely to depend on the school are those whose parents have not experienced college. Lee and Ekstrom (1987) report that 56 percent of public high school students report some counselor influence, particularly blacks, females, students in the academic track, and those who plan to attend four-year colleges. Chapman, O'Brien, and DeMasi (1987) found that one in five students never discussed college plans with a counselor.

Counselor Role. Counselors play a crucial role in the student's passage through the educational process. They facilitate decision-making and access to appropriate courses and experiences to help students address immediate and long-term goals. In public schools, scheduling and discipline take precedence over precollege counseling in the use of counselors' time (Lee & Ekstrom, 1987). Though the student:counselor ratio limits the practical availability of counseling, Chapman and DeMasi (1984) indicate that 20 percent of counselor time is used for college advising and that counselors report satisfaction with this situation.

Counseling Effectiveness. In some studies, precollege advising has come under a great deal of criticism. Though students appreciate counselors' functioning in other spheres, Chapman et al. (1987) found low-income students indifferent to the counselor's role in assisting with postsecondary preparation. College advising by the school counselor is especially important in low-income and minority families where parents are unable to offer first-hand information on college life, selection, and financial aid. Chapman et al. (1987) and Lee and Ekstrom (1987), however, have found that counselors often devote more time to college-bound, middle- and upper-income white students. Though blacks have significantly more counselor contacts than others (mostly regarding financial aid), in general low-income students do not make as great use of counselors as other students do.

Equity in Counseling

Family income is the major determinant of the education a student receives (Lee & Ekstrom, 1987). Counselors are in a position to help overcome the considerable inequities evident in education, provided that school systems give them the support and resources necessary to carry out their responsibilities.

Access to Counseling. Lee and Ekstrom (1987), on examination of the national longitudinal database, *High School and Beyond*, find differential access to counseling by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, aspiration level and ability. Also pertinent are size and location of schools, school resources, and expectations of the community. Access to counseling is thus acting as a social stratifier, possibly magnifying the differences in outcomes of secondary schooling. Students planning to attend college are more likely to seek counseling for planning their high school programs than are students without aspirations for higher education. Hispanics, whose attrition rate is particularly high (Ramon, 1985) and whose expectations of success in completing college are low, make less use of counseling services.

Tracking. Students who lack access to counseling are more likely to be placed in the non-academic curriculum track. Counseling for tracking is necessary at the beginning of a student's high school career, and neglect in this area has caused many students, especially minorities and low-income students, to lack adequate preparation for postsecondary education, thus perpetuating a situation of disadvantage. Choice of track is also tied into expectations. Vocational-track students presumably take coursework to match their career plans, but general track students have the least focus in their curricular programs and require correspondingly more assistance in making wise choices regarding appropriate employment or continuation of education. The Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling (1986) recommends that less talented students need to be in more flexible programs, moving up as competency improves and is demonstrated.

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Counseling must interpret to all students what is necessary for postsecondary educational access in order to help students overcome socioeconomic barriers.

Timelines in Precollege Counseling

The Elementary Years. Work with parents on supporting students' belief in their own capacities.

Middle or Junior High School. (1) Develop aspirations and sustain motivation; (2) promote effective study skills (notetaking, memorizing, etc.); (3) aid in clarification of values, decision-making; (4) differentiate among programs and courses, clarifying consequences of choices; (5) discuss graduation requirements, electives, required courses; (6) review testing history, decide on levels of secondary subjects; (7) schedule subjects (family decision) based on testing and academic experiences; (8) introduce guidance resources—counseling services, guidebooks and publications, computer programs, and video systems; and (9) suggest the possibility of college and the availability of financial aid.

Ninth Grade. (1) Schedule family meetings and individual conferences on course decisions; (2) present resource materials; (3) provide access to academic/career/vocational counseling; (4) organize group meetings, college and career planning nights; (5) review academic progress, determine future course selection; and (6) counsel for study skills (time management, memory improvement, filing, and retrieving information).

Tenth Grade. (1) Schedule family meetings on course selection, review of future plans and academic progress; (2) organize group meetings on college/career, financing college education; (3) encourage students to meet college representatives, attend college fairs, career programs, financial aid workshops; (4) provide guidance regarding goal-setting, decision-making, interview skills, testing skills; (5) conduct a writing and speaking curriculum unit; (6) assist in college planning—have students learn about tests, take PSAT/SAT, meet with counselors for test interpretation, obtain counsel regarding test-taking techniques; (7) advise college contacts—visiting college representatives, attending college days, college fairs, career programs; and (8) suggest students write for college materials.

Eleventh Grade. (1) Schedule family meetings on course selection, level determination, postsecondary plans/provisional college choices, planning for college, visiting colleges, financial aid; (2) provide testing and interpretation of results; (3) participate in college search; (4) assist early financial planning activity; (5) recommend students visit college representatives, college fairs, career days, colleges; (6) help plan summer visits, interviews, and receiving promotional literature; (7) have students write for information about admissions and financial aid; and (8) suggest discussions with students presently in college.

Twelfth Grade. (1) Arrange for family to receive schedule of admissions testing dates and additional guidance materials, attend college planning workshops on admissions and financial aid, visit campuses; (2) organize student workshops on college choice, review requirements; (3) have students take tests; (4) encourage students in seeking counsel on college admissions, applications, soliciting references; (5) advise students to speak to college representatives; (6) ensure students complete and submit all admissions and financial aid applications before deadlines; and (7) advise on replying to college responses regarding financial aid.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling (1986) and the National College Counseling Project (1986) address priorities for the schools in "broadening the frontiers of possibility," recommending: (1) a focus on student needs with college counseling acting as part of a long-term guidance curriculum; (2) attention to appropriate counselor qualities; (3) counselor-principal cooperation and faculty enlistment; (4) parent and family involvement; (5) emphasis on early and middle years, especially for underserved students; (6) collaboration with various colleges and community resources; (7) development of state-wide plans to address student needs; (8) support of federal programs helping disadvantaged students; (9) a focus on financial aid initiatives; and (10) revision of school counselor training.

Resource Documents

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Holmes, D. R., Dalton, H. F., Erdmann, D. G., Hayden, T. C., & Roberts, A. O. (1986). *Frontiers of possibility: Report of the national college counseling project.* Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, Instructional Development Center. (CG 020 238)

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National Association of College Admission Counselors. (1983). *From high school to college: A critical transition.* Washington, DC: Author. (ED 242 398)

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